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## The Saginaw News

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### Mexican ship docks in Carrollton

Saturday, June 24, 2006

**ALEX PIAZZA**  
**THE SAGINAW NEWS**

For the first time in 15 years, a saltwater vessel made its way down the Saginaw River late Thursday, said business representatives and dock operation managers.

The Onegro Merchant traveled from Veracruz, Mexico, to Sargent Docks & Terminal Inc., 5606 N. Westervelt, in Carrollton. It carried 5,000 tons of refined sugar needing re-refinement, said Ray VanDriessche, director of community and government relations for the Michigan Sugar Co.

"Normally, what we do is process our own sugar from our sugar beets," VanDriessche said. "They had asked us to turn it into liquid sugar. This is something unusual that we've never done before."

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Saltwater vessels typically do not traverse the Saginaw River because it is so shallow, VanDriessche said.

This week, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers corps officials began a 60-day, \$2 million project to cut into the Saginaw River's bottom to remove the silt that threatens to strangle shipping in Saginaw County. The corps plans to remove

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at least 5 feet from the shallows of Saginaw's only turning basin north of the Interstate 675 Henry G. Marsh Bridge and a mile-long stretch of the river channel downstream.

The basin now measures about 15 feet deep with patches as shallow as 13 feet. Contractors plan to deepen that channel to 20 feet. Dredging then will continue for a mile downstream, dropping the river bottom to 20 feet from 18 feet.

In addition, the U.S. House of Representatives recently approved \$3.6 million for additional dredging in the Saginaw River. The request, which represents a 50 percent increase over last year, now goes before the Senate. Funding for the Saginaw River would go into effect in October, the start of the 2007 fiscal year.

Theodore C. Loewe, Sargent Docks & Terminal operations manager, added there is a lot of planning that must go into the long trip to Michigan, and companies may not have faith that they can use the river when they get here.

"They have to be very, very careful and everything has to go without fail for it to be successful," he said. "The silt build-up would leave shipping companies overlooking these types of facilities (Saginaw River).

"Michigan Sugar and Sergeant Docks and Terminal got together as partners and worked very hard at convincing the companies that we were available to do this," Loewe said. "This is kind of historical. To open this river up is great for business."

The Onegro Merchant left port June 8 and traveled through the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Ocean and the St. Lawrence Seaway before arriving in the Saginaw River on Thursday. Offloading of the sugar began Friday.

The 393-foot long, 50-foot wide Onegro Merchant ship may stay docked until Sunday

VanDriessche said workers will send a portion of the 5,000-ton shipment to another receiver in Indiana.

Ships will bring more than 500,000 tons of sugar from Mexico into the United States this year, VanDriessche said.

"Shipments of refined sugar from Mexico did not meet the rigorous quality and purity standards or the demands of the more than 40 types of sugar that U.S. food manufacturers have grown to expect," said Mark Flegenheimer, president and chief executive officer of Michigan Sugar Co. "American sugar companies were asked to re-refine this sugar to address quality problems and turn it into a form that food manufacturers could use."

Alex Piazza is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9691.

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